



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 24, 2021

**CONTACT:**

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

[press@cityofchicago.org](mailto:press@cityofchicago.org)

**CHICAGO SELECTED TO TACKLE VACANT PROPERTIES AT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today announced Chicago is one of twelve cities across four states that have been selected to send a delegation to the 2022 Vacant Property Leadership Institute (VPLI), a training program focused on equipping leaders with the skills to address vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated properties for the benefit of their communities. Made possible through the generous support of the Wells Fargo Foundation, VPLI is a joint initiative of the Center for Community Progress (Community Progress) and National League of Cities (NLC).

"The storefronts and properties left vacant and abandoned here in Chicago have become the physical embodiments of the economic fallout of the pandemic," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "However, through the Vacant Property Leadership Institute, our community leaders will receive the skills necessary to turn these properties around in ways that will instead revitalize and strengthen our neighborhoods. The City of Chicago is proud to be one of twelve cities selected to participate in this invaluable program, which will allow us to take a huge step forward in our mission of reinvigorating our business corridors and the communities they serve."

Delegations from each of the following cities will participate: College Park, GA; Perry, GA; South Fulton, GA; Chicago, IL; Decatur, IL; Kankakee, IL; Peoria, IL; Rockford, IL; Louisville, KY; Winchester, KY; Milwaukee, WI; Racine, WI. Cities were selected through a competitive, two-round application process.

At the direction of the Mayor, Chicago recently formed an interdepartmental working group that incorporates all the departments in the city that have equities in relation to vacant lots. This group includes Streets and Sanitation, Planning and Development, Transportation, Public Health, Public Safety, Assets and Information Services, and many others. The Leadership Institute will enable us to continue the work of bringing together all the players that each own a part of this system to fully and comprehensively identify barriers and break them down.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



The selected cities include rural, suburban, and urban communities and range in population from just over 14,000 to over 2.7 million. They also face similar challenges such as faulty mortgage foreclosure processes, tax delinquency, ineffective property maintenance systems, and other property issues. Chicago was selected for VPLI because it demonstrates strong leadership, is committed to developing new solutions, and represents a unique opportunity to shift the systems responsible for vacant, abandoned, and other problem properties.

VPLI sessions will address how to operationalize equitable development practices to remedy vacancy, abandonment, and deterioration (VAD) and return buildings and land to productive use. Some of the strategies to be explored include data and market analysis, delinquent tax enforcement reform, strategic code enforcement, land banking, and more.

“NLC is proud to partner with the Center for Community Progress to support twelve cities in the development of equitable neighborhood development strategies,” said Clarence Anthony, CEO and Executive Director of the National League of Cities. “The Vacant Property Leadership Institute will serve as a unique opportunity for the participating cities to learn sustainable strategies that are centered in racial equity and contribute to the eradication of inequities within local infrastructure.”

“Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, communities across the country were already faced with daunting challenges in regard to vacant properties and their associated outcomes.” said Dr. Akilah Watkins, President and CEO of Community Progress. “The twelve cities selected to participate in the Leadership Institute each represent a unique opportunity to advance strategies for addressing vacancy in ways which are efficient, effective, and center racial equity. We are excited to provide them free educational programming and tailored technical assistance as they begin the long road to recovery.”

The Vacant Property Leadership institute combines Community Progress’ leading national expertise in helping communities develop efficient, effective, and equitable solutions to vacancy and abandonment with NLC’s longstanding history serving the interests of 19,000 cities, towns and villages in the US to build strong communities by expanding capacity, providing in-depth research and tools, and developing and implementing on-the-ground solutions.

###

### **About Center for Community Progress**

Founded in 2010, the Center for Community Progress is the national leader for building strong, equitable communities where vacant, abandoned, and deteriorated



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



properties are transformed into assets for neighbors and neighborhoods. Today, Community Progress has affected change in more than 48 states and seven countries through leadership education and collaborative systems, policy, and practice reforms. Simply, we work to transform “Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places.”

### **About National League of Cities**

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America’s cities, towns, and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy, and drive innovative solutions. Overall, the work of NLC seeks to help mayors, councilmembers and other local elected and appointed leaders build better communities.

### **About the Wells Fargo Foundation**

The Vacant Property Leadership Institute is made possible by grant funding from the Wells Fargo Foundation. This grant is part of the Wells Fargo Foundation’s efforts to keep more than 200,000 people affected by COVID-19 housed with grants to nonprofit housing organizations across the U.S. Overall, the Wells Fargo Foundation has donated over \$225 million to assist people and communities affected by COVID-19.